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ABSTRACT

This project attempts to identify the major problems underlying education reform in South Africa and compares them with similar challenges facing the District of Columbia public education system. Narration for the slide program is based on interviews, formal and informal meetings, lectures, and briefings. Slides of various schools and communities provide additional insights into the organization, inhabitants, and functions of specific environments and populations. The paper provides a geographic overview, a historic overview, and an examination of apartheid conditions; it also examines current challenges in politics, economics, health, and education. (EH)

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Curriculum Project: Outline for a Slide Illustrated Lecture on Education Reform in South Africa

Introduction

In order to meet the needs of a highly diverse student population, educators in the District of Columbia must continuously evaluate the appropriateness of their curricula. Currently, these educators face many of the same concerns that the educators and policy makers in South Africa must now consider as they endeavor to restructure their education system. This project will attempt to identify the major problems underlying educational reform in South Africa, and will compare them with similar challenges facing the District of Columbia public education system.

Objectives:

To provide a geographic and historic overview of South Africa

To review Apartheid era conditions

To identify current challenges in politics, economics, health and education

To evaluate strategies which are being developed to cope with current challenges

To examine the potential for future growth and development

To identify and discuss similarities which exist between the education reform challenges in South Africa, and those facing the District of Columbia

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Strategies:

Information on policy initiatives, obtained through meetings with South African government officials and representatives of private agencies, will be shared with various target audiences through a slide illustrated lecture format. These audiences will include Woodrow Wilson faculty, administrators, students, parents, business partners and others interested in South Africa. Additional information, collected during site visits to various urban and rural schools, and through conversations with South African teachers, administrators and students, has been incorporated into the presentation to better illustrate the practical issues involved in education reform.

Materials:

Narration for the slide program is based on information collected in interviews, formal and informal meetings, lectures and briefings. This information has been merged with information from source documents such as the new South African Constitution and the White Paper on Education. Slides of various schools and communities provide additional insights into the organization, inhabitants, and functions of specific environments and populations. Relevant items such as policy statements, newspaper articles, maps, local literature, and statistical data further compliment the presentation.

Questions:

At the outset of the presentation, participants will be asked to look for similarities between the challenges facing educators and students in South Africa, and those facing the DC public schools. These impressions will form the basis for a follow-up discussion in which participants will compare and contrast the problems in South Africa to those which are endemic to the District of Columbia.

Background Notes (narration) for Slide Presentation:

I Introduction

Fulbright-Hays Seminars Abroad Program: includes 4-6 week study/travel opportunities for U.S. educators in social sciences and humanities.

Title: "Understanding the New South Africa: A Major Power in Transition" 18 participants from around the US. Met with teachers, economists, politicians, artists etc. Visited schools, government offices, townships, theater, villages etc. in 7 of 9 provinces.

II Geographic Overview

SA occupies 472,359 square miles of southernmost part of African continent. Boundaries with Namibia, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Swaziland. Completely encloses Lesotho. Borders on both the South Atlantic and Southern Indian Oceans. Subtropical climate: mostly dry with unreliable rainfall. Summer is October to March, and winter is April to September. Climate varies in the nine provinces from hot summers & frosty winters in the "Lowveld" (Jo'burg) to humid summers along the southeastern coast (Durban) to dry summers and wet winters in the Western Cape (Capetown).

III Historic Overview

First inhabitants: nomadic hunters 100,000 years ago, replaced by agro-pastoralists about 2,000 years ago. Dutch base for East India Company established. in 1652 to service passing ships. Slaves brought in from Eastern empire and Africa. British arrived early 1800's. Conflicts between Europeans led to Great Trek in 1836-38 (Capetown to Pretoria). Asians arrived about mid 1800's, mostly to provide labor for sugar plantations along Indian ocean. Discovery of diamonds in 1900 led to further influx of Europeans and Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902. Boers lost, but by 1910 the whites formed a coalition government which excluded blacks from power. NP came to power in 1948 under DF Malan. Successive NP leaders, Hendrik Verwoerd, John Vorster and PW Botha established/maintained Apartheid until 1994

IV Apartheid Era Conditions

Salient features:

*minorities were moved to homelands and refused right to live in cities (forced to spend time/$ on transport instead of their building their own businesses, organizing against the regime etc.)
*lack of attention to infrastructure in homelands (no roads, services)
*denial of education, healthcare and political rights to minorities
*low levels of education and training for all but whites
*high unemployment and infant mortality among minorities

Re education: Bantu education act in 1953 placed all non-whites in homeland schools. "Culture of Resistance" developed as a result. This divided black parents and children and ultimately led to the 1976 Soweto uprising "the children's revolution). At that time, there were 19 different (racially based) ed departments. Four times as much money was spent on white education. Teacher-pupil ratio for blacks averaged 41:1 (up to 80:1); for whites it was 19:1. 1992 pass rates for blacks: 44%, for coloreds: 86%, for whites 98%. 1991: 56% blacks graduated vs. 96 whites and 56% black teachers hadn't finished high school themselves (only 41% had gone beyond the 7th grade). When integration started in the 80's, 80% of white parents had to agree to integration (if it was to occur at all), blacks had to be the minority, and schools had to be in white areas.

The Soweto uprising 1976, collapse of USSR, independence of Namibia, economic sanctions, pressure from US & Europe contributed to release of Mandela in 1990 and unbanning of ANC. Despite election of new government in 1994, violence between ANC, Inkatha, NP and others still exists. (Currently violent crime rate in South Africa 3 times higher than in the US; Jo'burg most violent city in the world. A woman is raped every 6 seconds, killed every 6 days by partner. Car jackings one of biggest problems. Met four people who had been carjacked.)

V Current Challenges in Politics, Economics, Health and Education

a) Politics

Communication difficulties due to: racial integration (old whites have more training and experience, new blacks recognize they need this but cooperation among govt. officials is difficult); tri-partite nature of govt. i.e. executive branch in Pretoria, legislative branch in Capetown, judicial branch in Bloemfontein also creates communication problems.

ANC govt. elected in 1994. They merged with the NP to form the Govt. of National Unity (GNU) which dissolved during our visit when the NP withdrew and became the first official opposition party. Problems with Inkatha Freedom Party continue to exist as Zulus (majority ethnic group) feel they have been shut out of the political process.

Due to pressure from intl agencies to downsize govt. and to privatize, GNU implemented conservative economic policies. People expected big spending on housing, jobs would happen rather than budget cuts. Led to battle between ANC and trade unions (former allies). Also has exacerbated violence. Big business and labor are "cozy." Both opposed to free trade and new investment because they want to keep control of the market.

b) Economics

Natural resource base: crop production and livestock holdings poor due to inadequate rainfall and lack of large rivers for irrigation. Lack of access to credit, markets, skills further hamper small-scale agricultural development

"Food deficit region" but some grain exported

Mining of gold and diamonds good but production declining due to increasing production costs (60% of GNP is in mining)

Human resource base: underpopulated compared with other African countries (33 per square kilometer estimate. Hard to be exact when no census was ever done in the homelands and pop figures are all guesses)

High proportion of (uneducated) females to males i.e. more difficult for women, especially unskilled women to enter the labor mkt resulting in high unemployment
High degree of dualism i.e. 1st vs. 3rd world conditions (most skewed income distribution in the world)

Capital and Technology: highly dependent on foreign aid to develop infrastructure. Open economy with imports/exports but country in a recession since early 1990's.

Economic challenges: $2 billion to provide water for est. 13-16 million without it! So far, 1 1/2 million people have gotten it. (lack of water for ag biggest constraint to growth). Shortage of capital less of a problem than "lack of absorbtive capacity" i.e. institutions, infrastructure, trained staff etc. Rural electrification putting huge drain on economy (squatters use but can't afford to pay - rural electrical boards going broke).

Need to: create jobs/make sure salaries appropriate (too many people employed at inflated prices due to strong influence of labor unions i.e. excess waiters in restaurants etc.); sort out land reform (trying to even out dualism i.e. large-scale capital intensive white ag. vs. subsistence black ag. (new goal: viable small-scale farming with increased production); provide more ed/training in math and science to combat brain drain; close down non-competitive manufacturers (textiles protected against tarrifs but South African can't compete as long as labor intensive work over employs women); start exporting finished goods i.e. jewelry instead of raw materials (example: raw gold is sent to Italy where Italians make the jewelry and pocket hefty profits)

c) Health

Est. 1.8 million people are HIV positive. Social stigma connected with visiting an AIDS clinic keeps people from getting help. Belief that having sex with virgin is a cure also exacerbating the problem. A negative response to family planning common, access to birth control is difficult, and abortion illegal. (Est. 200,000 women die each year from back ally abortions). Common unwillingness to teach sex ed at home and parents oppose sex ed in schools but some non profit

groups now offering workshops, access to condoms etc. which are well attended. Also NGO's have hotlines and counseling but people don't have phones!

Free pre natal care and care for children up to six is now available, but clinics few and far between so access from rural areas (where need is greatest) is a problem. Even Alexandra (township outside Jo'burg) has only one clinic with 12 doctors which treats 1,500 people a day.

Other problems: male circumcision (12 boys died in one group rite while we were there. Govt. feels it's useless to ban it given the cultural traditions, but they're trying to provide training, supplies etc. Little information on FGM.) Other prevalent diseases include TB, various STD's, malaria, measles and malnourishment.

d) Education

Key principals of new ed policy:

democratization of education
equal access for all to basic education
integrated schools

Three tiers of govt: national (overall policy development and funding); provincial and district (both of which integrate schools).

Overview of Challenges:

No existing maps/data etc. from schools that were in the homelands.

Decentralization at the local level is problematic because local leaders have not had the power or training to manage ed programs. In many cases they have not even been in South Africa i.e. they were in exile. This is also true at the national level which makes for a very strange social situation i.e. old Afrikaaner leaders (with the knowledge) are serving as secretaries and clerks while newly elected officials are trying to develop policies without the requisite experience or background.

Little integration has occurred. 15,000,000 functionally illiterate adults. 12,000,000 kids not in school. 1/5 First world and 4/5 Third World. Most blacks still live in rural areas or townships and cost plus commutes of up to 2 hours to get to town schools are deterrents. 19,000 of 28,000 do not have electricity! Materials and supplies are also lacking to non-existent.

Minority kids are made to adapt to existing curricula and policies - white teachers cannot relate to their experiences. This is tough as they are not used to going to school, having a schedule, doing homework, having parents who are involved, feeling torn between two cultures etc. (Key problem: how to replace a "culture of avoidance" with a "culture of learning.") Language barrier is also a problem plus different cultural norms i.e. black kids taught to listen and not to interrupt and are judged as non-assertive and disinterested by white teachers. Black kids perceive whites as loud, disrespectful etc. Also, blacks are more group-oriented where as the white system is more focussed on individuals and competition.

Girls are particularly disadvantaged due to marrying young, getting pregnant, priority given to boys by parents (they will be main breadwinner so boys need to stay in school), by teachers, and by sterotypical images in books. Also, school is a violent place for girls i.e. rapes and harassment serve as deterrents for girls to attend.

Due to strong union movement, 80% of current education budget goes to salaries leaving little for materials etc. However, 40,000 teacher lay-offs have started to bring salaries into line.

Higher birth rate, urbanization and improved access will increase the need to additional primary schools very soon, but the focus at this time is mostly on secondary schools due to a stronger union movement at that level.

Measures Taken to Help:

Entry tests have been replaced with placement tests. Goal is to eventually offer tests in all 11 official languages (currently generally offered in English, Zulu and 1-2 additional tribal languages depending on the province). New cross-cultural teacher training programs introduced in 1996. Racist, sexist language has been removed from 15 of 60 standard syllabi to date.

Alternative charter-type schools being organized in local communities and funded with NGO money. Work in progress to develop standardized exams which will include multi-cultural lit info on black African history etc.

New agenda items (never addressed by previous regime) such as pre-K and adult ed programs are staring to operate.

Basic ed is now free and compulsory for the 1st 10 years plus free food for kids 6 and under. Also, supplementary ed programs are appearing on TV and materials are being published in newspapers and magazines to provide wider access.

Minority student population increasing in higher ed by 8% per year but 65% fail in first year due to lack of preparation and cross-cultural problems. Trained black professors have a hard time getting work since they have not published much (most publishing houses are Afrikaaner owned and operated so there has been high resistance to publishing multi-cultural works). Nearly 90% of all professionally skilled workers in South Africa are still white. Universities are staring to form consortia with technical schools, nursing schools etc. to offer "bridging" programs to better prepare/serve minority students. Also distance and self-study materials are being developed to assist students in more remote areas.

VI Potential for Future Growth and Development

ANC was a liberation party. Now they're a political party in power. This transition slows down progress on specific goals/projects.

RDP recently collapsed. Functions have been allocated to Mbeke and various govt. ministries. Future unclear.

Possible political scenarios:

1) ANC and unions could split and left wing party could take power
2) Mbeke will win youth vote and reconcile with unions to keep power (Mandela will not run in 1997. Common belief is that Mbeke will be the next president)

Outside political relations are good. Since the election of Mandela, South Africa has opened diplomatic relations with 41 new countries.

The outlook for South Africa's well-diversified, open economy in which agriculture, mining, secondary industry, commerce, tourism and a broad structure of other service establishments contribute to the wealth of the country, is good.

Evaluation:

Following the presentation, participants will be asked to identify challenges which are common to both the South African and DC education systems. Participants should be able to discuss and give examples of the following:

-specific challenges such as inadequate classrooms and materials, low quality of infrastructure, vandalism, expense of bussing kids, high teacher-pupil ratio, poor pass rates, uninvolved parents, lack of census data, lack of a "culture of learning," long commutes & poor nutrition, teachers who are unable to relate to student experiences, highly paid/unionized teachers doing the bare minimum etc.

-ways in which educators and policy makers are attempting to provide equal access to education for all students i.e. placement vs. entry tests, open enrollment, new schools being built in remote areas, supplementary materials in newspapers, magazines and on TV etc.

-ways in which curriculum renewal is being used to ensure that instructional materials and activities are appropriate to the needs and experiences of a diverse population i.e. tests and curriculum materials being developed in various languages; cross-cultural teacher training and mediation programs being introduced; removal of racist/sexist language from standard texts; inclusion of multi-cultural lit and history curricula etc.

-projects in which public and/or private organizations are collaborating with local schools to enhance educational opportunities i.e. new charter school movement with more local autonomy sponsored by donors; Peace Corps is staring a school project, local

companies are collaborating with schools to enhance the curricula with hands-on components, and to provide career counseling and training.